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# Romanian-Hungarian cross-border cultural and educational relations<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The work aims at capturing the cultural dimension of education in the Romanian-Hungarian border and the priority of the Bihor - Hajdu Bihar Euro-region, through the exchange of teachers, students, facilitated by the funding of the European projects, cooperation at institutional level and euro regional cross-border projects implemented by the local authorities, passing in this task by a foray into the history of cooperation at the level of the communities in study.*

**Keywords:** *cross-border cooperation, culture, education, European programs, cross-border projects.*

The falling of communism in Romania in the 90s, like other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, allowed the Romanian state the involvement in various combinations of cross-border twinning. The legal support for such steps is given by Emergency Ordinance no. 120/1998 aimed at ratifying the Framework Convention on cross-border cooperation between territorial communities or authorities, the European Charta of Local Self-Government, ratified by Romania in 1997, and the Madrid Convention on cross-border cooperation (See: Official Portal Chamber Bihar Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

This work aims mainly the Romanian-Hungarian cooperation within the existing territorial structures on the western border of Romania, focusing on Bihar Euro-region, created in 2002 at the initiative of County Council, Bihor, Romania. The function of this Euro-region is provided by the Rules of the organization and functioning of Euro-region Bihar (Romania) - Hajdu-Bihar (Hungary), adopted in Oradea, on September 11, 2002. From a structurally point of view, the Euro-region is a combination of administrative - territorial units of the same level, on the one hand, and the inclusion of other junior units, individually or in combination, with a framework for expanded cooperation both horizontally and vertical (Ilieș: 2004, p.154).

It works in Romanian and / or Hungarian, and when the context so requires, in other languages in the European Union. The two sides, Bihor (RO) and Hajdú-Bihar (HU) have identical rights and obligations and their actions are based on mutual trust and good neighborhood. The management structure of the Euroregion is: the Council, the Steering Committee (institutions agree on accepting new members), the Presidency, secretariats and working groups, each with its well established role (See: Official Portal of Bihar County Council).

The general objectives of the Euroregion aim: to maintain and develop good neighborly relations, identifying areas of potential cross-border cooperation; organizing and coordinating those activities that promote collaboration between its members in social, economic, cultural, educational, health, environment and tourism; implementation of concrete programs in areas of common interest, promoting the collaboration of residents and professionals working in various fields of common interest; promoting the Euro-region's cooperation with other international organizations; assisting in the preparation of the Euro-region members in their EU accession states by supplying useful information and through joint development projects aiming to obtain financial funding from the European Union (see : the official portal of Bihar County Council).

The cooperation within the Euro-regions cover several areas among which we mention trade, culture, education etc.. and access has resulted in the municipality, in partnership with the Hungarian

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side of the PHARE cross-border cooperation programs (PHARE CBC), to mention a few projects: "Oradea-Debrecen Cultural Bridge"; in 2003, "Business Access"; unfolded in 2004 (See: Official Portal Haidu Bihar-Bihar Euro) or more recent program of promoting in the entire world the touristic objectives of Bihar-Hajdu Bihar Euro-region as an European touristic destination "Unity and Diversity in the Euro-region's tourism" (see: the Official Portal of the Bihar-Hajdu Bihar Euro-region).

In the center of all these actions there are two cities, Oradea (RO) and Debrecen (HU) under one side of the Romanian-Hungarian border. Over time, the two municipalities have an important contribution to the solidification border cooperation in the western border of Romania. "The realities of today's relations between Romania and Hungary, the common aspirations of both peoples to integrate into European and Euro-Atlantic structures are the foundations on which we can and must build a new type of collaborations, truly European", specified Iosif Mutula (Mutula:2005).



Re-united inside the mentioned Euro-region, along the history, the two cities were considered part of a whole, the same administrative structure. It is the XVI - XVII centuries, when the Debrecen and Oradea have been part of the Principality of Transylvania, then in the first half of the twentieth century, specifically between 1919-1920, Debrecen city was under occupation of the Romanian army. Since then dates the postmark issued by Debrecen, shown in picture. After the fall of the communist bloc, the relations between the two cities have moved beyond the formal relations of authority level, they being strongly installed between the two communities and between business, based on the older cooperative relations and collaboration in the region.

Therefore, after 1990, the first twinning agreement with the European cities of Oradea was signed on September 30, 1992, and aimed Debrecen. The document is authenticated by the signature of two mayors of the moment Petru Filip (Romania) and Hevessy Jozsef (Hungary) (See: Official Portal Oradea City Hall).

So far, the border area faces the need to overcome barriers faced by specific socio-economic specific to border territories. Both this is achievable by attracting investment into the area or by completing and implementing projects with European funding. This is where strong two factors, the education - marked by the existence of two universities already involved in numerous cross-border cooperation projects - and cultural - underlined by the present influences in the two border counties, either from the point of view of tradition, or architectural and not only.

From the educational perspective, the collaboration between the two universities in Debrecen and Oradea is an extremely dynamic one. They have implemented numerous projects of which we mention the 2004 summer school, which entailed a lot of international conferences with the theme Education without Borders.

A first confirmation of collaboration among universities in the Romanian-Hungarian border is the teacher and student exchanges taking place between the University of Oradea and University of Debrecen, European Erasmus mobility program facility, where a number of Romanian teachers from different areas of study, have been exchanging experiences with European Union member countries - Hungary, at a prestigious university, recognized at European level.

For this, we will continue under the form of tables the teacher and students mobility from the University of Oradea to the University of Debrecen. The information is obtained from the databases of the Department of International Relations, University of Oradea.

Students 2005 – 2006

Table 1

Nr. Crt	Domain	Period of program	Number of students
1.	Medicine	6 months	1
2.	Medicine	6 months	1
3.	Geography	9 months	1
4.	Geography	9 months	1
5	Geography	9 months	1

6.	Geography	6 months	1
7.	International Relations	9 months	1
8.	Psychology	9 months	1

**Teachers 2005 – 2006**

**Table 2**

<b>Nr. Crt</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Period of program</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>
1.	Geography	10days	1
2.	Geography	10 days	1

**Students 2006 – 2007**

**Table 3**

<b>Nr. Crt</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Perioada programului</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
1.	Geography	6 luni	1
2.	Geography	6 luni	1
3.	Social Sciences	5 luni	1
4.	Informatics. Computer Science	5 luni	1
5.	Social Sciences	5 luni	1

**Teachers 2006 – 2007**

**Table 4**

<b>Nr. Crt</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Perioada programului</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>
1.	Economics	15 days	1
2.	Agricultural sciences	10 days	1
3.	Informatics. Computer Science	10 days	1
4.	Management	5 days	1
5.	Informatics. Computer Science	10 days	1
6.	Management	10 days	1
7.	Social Sciences	10 days	1
8.	Geography	20 days	1
9.	Economics	5 days	1
10.	Economics	5 days	1
11.	Economics	5 days	1
12.	Economics	5 days	1

**Students 2007 – 2008**

**Table 5**

<b>Nr. Crt</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Period of program</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
1.	Economics	4 months	1
2.	Biology	5 months	1
3.	Agriculture	9 months	1

**Teachers 2007 – 2008**

**Table 6**

<b>Nr. Crt</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Period of program</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>
1.	Geography	30 days	1
2.	Law	25 days	1
3.	Economics	10 days	1
4.	Language and Philological Sciences	10 days	1
5.	Geography	10 days	1
6.	Social Sciences	30 days	1
7.	Agriculture	10 days	3
8.	Management	20 days	2

From the data obtained for 2005-2008, we find a decrease in the number of students choosing to study for several months in Debrecen. A probable cause is the increasing of supply in May involving

Western universities and less accessible for Romanian students in other circumstances. Moreover, the number of teachers at the University of Oradea, interested in exchanging experiences with Debrecen increased considerably. If in 2005-2006, only two teachers from the Department of Geography, made Erasmus stagies in Debrecen, later, after developing the inter-university collaboration Oradea-Debrecen, their number increased to 11, for the period of 2007-2008.

Also on an educational line, particularly important for Oradea-Debrecen collaboration is the project initiated by University of Oradea, in partnership with the Debrecen in 2005. Approved by the European Commission 2005-2126/001-001 Convention (nr.ref. C05/0015) and accepted by the University of Oradea, by decision of 1 October 2005 the University Senate, the project gave rise to the Euroregional Studies Institute, the Center of European Excellence "Jean Monnet". Launched in January 2006, through an international conference which gathered more than 50 teachers from Europe, the Institute noted so far by many scientific research from which emerged numerous works aimed at cross-border cooperation and the general European borders or physical, religious, cultural etc. We mention here the Institute's magazine, Eurolimes, already at number eight, indexed in three international databases and qualified with B + by CNCISIS, and then the volumes of international conferences: *Regional Development in The Romanian-Hungarian Cross-border Space-from National To European Perspective, Challenges and Perspective in the Regional and Euro-regional Issue in the New Europe*, etc.

Besides the educational aspect, the cultural borders is a very current issue to studies aimed at cross-border cooperation and international relations, in a world where globalization and development of international trade business is so common. Culture itself is a very complex term, which extends to literature, arts, drama, music and dance, but with both tradition and everything that involves collective mentality.

During this period the trend to suppress territorial borders, cultural borders continue to exist. An important factor is the language of cultural identity. Use of Romanian and Hungarian language on both sides of the border was not and is not subject to the existence of political borders. Half of Oradea and the surrounding citizens speak Hungarian, as a large proportion of Hungarian citizens of Debrecen and the surrounding villages speak Romanian. Knowing a language or another does not require citizenship, but stresses that the individual identity of belonging to a nation or another, in a tradition or another. However, we find the border often a cultural syncretism. The Romanian spoken by the Romanian citizens in Bihar continues many words from Hungarian and Hungarian-born citizens of Bihar (RO) speak a Hungarian distorted, often only understood by the natives.

And in terms of traditions we observe the confluence in the case of the people from the border. Also from this point of view the political boundary does not exclude the cultural one. The common past and the proximity of the two cities brought many influences on both sides of the border. From these we remark the "Flower Carnival" feast which takes place every year on August 22. The idea of organizing a carnival comes from Debrecen. The flower floats cross the town, allowing Oradea to admire them every year. The event is always a reason for organizing a popular music festival, which may follow different folkloric groups in Bihor-Hajdu-Bihar region ("Crisana", "Nagyvárad", "Hajdú Táncegyüttes" (Hajdú-Bihar) and "Regenbogen" , groups of Tileagd, Valea lui Mihai and Bors).(3) It does not miss the already well known popular exhibition, organized by the Muzeul Tarii Crisurilor, in June-July every year, where typical products are exposed to the Romanian and Hungarian visitors for tasting and sales.

The series of cultural encounters continues with the Euro-regional music festival which this year found the fifth edition. The last edition took place in December 2009, brought into the public arena of the Oradea Philharmonic the public of Debrecen "folk singers, classical music and light music in Bihar and neighboring counties Hajdú-Bihar" (Bihor Reality: 2009 ). Designed in the mirror (one day in Oradea and one in Debrecen) the festival contest aims to discover new talents, but also promoting cultural values of the two countries. "The annual festival organizers are the County Center for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture in Bihor and Cultural Center Library Meliusz Péter Juhász" (Bihor Reality: 2009).

The cultural-educational dimension of the two cities Debrecen and Oradea can be efficiently emphasized due to the short distance between them (60 km), as the nearest city is taking into account the two cities as population size (200,000 together), a radius of 100 km, which is a prerequisite for the development of cultural relations between the two communities at school.

After a research (Istvan Suli - Zakar: 2008, p.76) made at the level of the two communities in late 2007 and early 2008, if we question the cultural side we note that the populations of two neighboring towns visit the neighbor space in different purposes, among which there are also the educational and cultural ones (cultural exchanges, educational exchanges: teachers, students, European projects, international conferences), at a rate of up to 3% but the most important goal for Romanians and Hungarians is that connected to shopping in the neighbor village.

To achieve the goals, the most commonly used means of transport, etc.. own car (the community of Oradea 33.3% and 25.8% for community Debrecen) (Istvan Suli - Zakar: 2008, p.75), this means being used because of the short distance, the existence of infrastructure of quality and timely manner in which you walk the distance.

The SWOT analysis (Istvan Suli - Zakar: 2008, p.80-81) also made during the above mentioned research, reveals very well the cultural-educational dimension between Oradea and Debrecen through the following indicators (frequency response) for each of the four categories of analysis:

- a) strengths: cultural objectives (54 Oradea, Debrecen 19), architectural buildings (Oradea 40), academic environment, university (39 Oradea, Debrecen 108)
- b) weaknesses: mindset (Debrecen 7) old buildings (Oradea 24)
- c) opportunities: scholarships (Oradea 10) academic environment (Oradea 6), education (Debrecen 10), culture (Debrecen 5)
- d) threats: old buildings (Oradea 20), politics (17), migration (7)

As is evident from the results of the SWOT analysis at the level of public opinion of the two communities, as well as strengths may highlight the cultural dimension and academic - educational dimension, at its basis being two cities with a rich legacy of material and spiritual values and on the other hand the educational tradition at an academic level.

The weaknesses are less represented what gives a note of confidence of the two cities as educational as indicators of cultural stability being surprised mentality and old buildings which are an invaluable cultural value but require external intervention to maintain the optimum for the future generations.

As opportunities are found scholarships that can be accessed by European funds in the university that allows exchanges of teachers and students at Hungary and Romania's level, and as target the institutions University of Oradea University of Debrecen, funds that allow the accumulation of educational cultural experiences on both sides of the border in Bihar - Hajdu Bihar Euro-region.

The threats appear, but not with a very high frequency, namely the old buildings we've found and weaknesses that can be turned into strengths by concentrating their efforts towards restoration, the political side that its decisions may occur bad directions on the cultural dimension - not least education and labor migration well prepared because the training is conducted at the academic level of the two academic institutions of the two cities.

The cooperation in the cultural-educational dimension between the cities of Debrecen and Oradea is very well emphasized by research findings, but to strengthen the academic side we mention the existence of a cooperation agreement at the University of Oradea and University of Debrecen in 2000, after identifying the interests mutual concerns and have set start cooperation at institutional level in several directions as follows:

- a) training students at all levels of education through various forms of existing cooperation and recognized national and European level
- b) scientific research and cultural activities.

According to data we hold the view that educational and cultural relations between the two countries, on the western border of Romania, are constantly evolving, constantly involving more and more institutions under one side of the border.

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